



## Here's to the Unsung Hero

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The successful executive, the famous comedian, the sports champion, the victorious politician have become the heroes of our fame-infatuated world. And to be sure, many of these high achievers deserve our congratulations and respect. But even as we honor our acknowledged heroes, aren't we possibly forgetting something?

### Overdue for a Bow?

Isn't it time to recognize the people who make all of this winning possible — the "unsung heroes"?

How about the nurse who attends the patient, freeing the prominent surgeon to treat the next person in need? How about the football lineman who throws the crucial tackle, opening the way for the halfback's touchdown run; the writer who toils into the wee hours developing the comedian's hysterical monologue; or the campaign staffer who devises the crucial strategy that puts the politician over the top?

These are just some of the unsung heroes. Don't forget the PR person who preps the executive before the key interview, or the proofreader who makes sure that all the i's are dotted and the t's crossed before the critical document goes to press. Often accepting a fraction of the compensation that their better-known counterparts are paid, unsung heroes frequently labor in obscurity with little recognition for their efforts. Their moment of fame may be simply a line on an organization chart or honorable mention in a management e-mail. Or, maybe, nothing at all.

While it's true that many of these heroes shun the lime-light out of humility or perceived risk, their true contributions are much too important to be overlooked or forgotten.

### "If you want something done..."

Fortunately, every successful organization has numerous

unsung heroes who keep moving it forward. You know who they are. They're the first ones to volunteer for the jobs that nobody wants, the go-to people when the going gets tough, the individuals who take up the slack when others come up short, and the staffers who help their bosses look good.

It's likely that they are also the people who turn the lights on in the morning and off at night, eating lunches at their desks, never missing a day's work. And yes, we keep piling the work on even though they're the busiest ones around.

Our excuse? "If you want something done...give it to someone who's busy."

In fact, many unsung heroes are so good at what they do that we often take their capabilities for granted. Worse yet, sometimes we're so busy calming down the people with the biggest egos, or those with the highest personal demands, that we may even forget that our unsung heroes are there. Tragic.

Typically, the unsung heroes don't get their deserved credit because they live in the shadow of an individual. They don't jockey for the glory, ask for the raise, or request the promotion because they're just busy getting their job done. In fact, they come to work day in and day out, keeping their nose to the grindstone and helping the

organization win — and in the process, they often make other people look good.

Unsung heroes get promoted less often because they're considered just too good at what they do and too valuable in their current role. And while we spend hours debating compensation for our execs, we are inclined to write our unsung heroes boilerplate performance reviews (only because it's required), give everyone near-equal raises (regardless of performance), and then send everyone home, expecting them to be happy. Shortsighted indeed.

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What a shame.

And, because our unsung heroes never cause “trouble” and are loyal to our cause, we don’t spend much time thinking about their needs. Why? We think they’ll never leave. Their willingness to stand by and “take it” convinces us that they have limited ambition or few other options. Risky.

Many times we realize their value only after they’re unavailable or when they resign. And then we add insult to injury by countering the offer of their new employer. Sad but true.

We rationalize. You can’t watch your team’s blocker when you’re running for the goal line. You can’t take your eye off the deadline to recognize the technician who kept your computer running. And it may even hurt your ego to admit that you needed their help. But if we don’t find a way to say “thanks,” we may lose the very people who help us win. What a shame.

### Time for Change

It’s about time that we acknowledge the critical importance of our unsung heroes. And although many of them would be

pleased just for the recognition, we can’t stop there.

Take some time and find ways to show your unsung heroes that you care. If they are like you, chances are the same positive feedback and acknowledgment that make you feel appreciated, and motivate you to do your best are what they need as well. A special bonus, raise, or promotion couldn’t hurt either.

And, you never know...maybe they’ll stay with your organization for years to come and continue to make you look good. ●

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